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1/1/50

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Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE
1949-1950

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 331ST INFANTRY
(83RD INFANTRY DIVISION) AT LANGLIR, BELGIUM
11-12 JANUARY 1945
(ARDENNES CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Rifle Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY RIFLE COMPANY
ATTACKING THROUGH A FOREST AND SUBSEQUENT NIGHT ATTACK

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ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company A, 331st Infantry, 83rd Infantry Division in the attack on LANGLIR, BELGIUM, 11-12 January 1945, during the offensive phase of the ARDENNES Campaign.

In order to orient the reader it will be necessary to discuss briefly the major events which led up to this action.

On 1 December, the concept of the enemy capabilities was still as expressed in G-2 estimate No. 36 Headquarters First US Army, dated 20 November 1944, which is quoted here in part.

"a Enemy Capabilities

"(1) The enemy is capable of defense of the REICH west of the RHINE, probably along the general line IJSEL-MASS-ROER and WEST WALL, and in the Third US Army Area MAGINOT LINE-WEST WALL and the RHINE.

"(2) The enemy is capable of retiring to a defense line behind the RHINE.

"(3) The enemy is capable of collapse or surrender.

"(4) The enemy is capable of air 'blitz' to regain air supremacy in limited vital areas." (1)

Evidence accumulated rapidly to alter this estimate. Outstanding items of intelligence were gathered daily from Theatre

(1) A-1, p. 99

and lower units. Such items as entire divisions being withdrawn from the Italian and Eastern fronts, reforming of troops in the enemy rear area, organizing new and special units, intensive training of these units. These were all indications of an enemy offensive operation, instead of defensive.

The intelligence received during this period is summed up in G-2 estimate No. 37 Headquarters First US Army dated 10 December 1944 which is quoted here in part.

"a. Enemy Capabilities.

"(1) The enemy is capable of continuing his defense of the line of the ROER north of DUREN, his present front line west of the ROER covering the dams and thence south along the west wall.

"(2) The enemy is capable of a concentrated counter-attack with air, armor, Infantry, and secret weapons at a selected focal point at a time of his own choosing.

"(3) The enemy is capable of defending on the line of the ERFT and subsequently retiring behind the RHINE.

"(4) The enemy is capable of collapse or surrender." (2)

On the morning 16 December, the enemy launched the greatest counteroffensive against Allied Forces since the invasion of NORMANDY. The attack was initiated on the northern portion of the broad front held by the VIII Corps. It was supported by a heavy schedule of well coordinated artillery fire commencing at 0530 hours on front line troops, artillery positions, command posts and communications areas. After two and a half hours of this, long range artillery concentrated on key rear installations

(2) A-1, p. 102

at ROTGEN, EUPEN, MALMEDY, VERVIERS, and ST VITH with the bulk of the firing in the southern half of V Corps sector and all along the VIII Corps front. (3)

The broad plan of the enemy was to strike toward the MEUSE and on to BRUSSELS and ANTWERP. With the Sixth SS Pz army on the right driving through to LIEGE, and the Fifth Pz army thrusting toward NAMUR. A diversionary attack was also to be made by the Seventh German Army with LUXEMBOURG as the objective. The area of attack was a sixty mile front between the ERFEL and the ARDENNES. (See Map A) (4)

This enemy offensive action made great progress, overrunning all friendly units in the area. This push continued to a depth of approximately seventy-five miles.

By 3 January Allied Forces had succeeded in halting this drive and was in position to start its counter offensive against the salient.

The Allied Plan for the reduction of the salient called for the Third US Army to attack the southern flank, and the First US Army to attack the northern flank driving a wedge through the salient.

VII CORPS MISSION

The VII Corps was assigned the major attack mission of the 1st Army. It was composed of 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions, the 83rd and 84th Infantry Divisions, and 4th Cavalry group. The Corps was to attack in its zone east of the OURTHE RIVER capture HOUFFALIZE, then be prepared to attack east on army order. (See Map A) (5)

- (3) A-1, p. 103
- (4) A-1, p. 103
- (5) A-1, p. 126

At 0830 hours 3 January 1945 the First Army launched an attack on a twenty-five mile front against the center of the enemy salient. In spite of the wintry weather substantial advances were made, in some areas up to 4,000 yards, capturing several villages and key terrain features. This attack lost no momentum, by 10 January in the zone of VII Corps, the 4th Cavalry group maintained contact with the British on the west bank of the OURTHE RIVER near MARCOURT. Farther east, the 2nd Armored Division advanced more than 1,000 yards, captured SAMREE, and moved well into the BOIS DE ST JEAN. (6)

On the front of the 83rd Division BIHAIN was cleared in the afternoon. The 331st Infantry repulsed a counterattack from the vicinity of PETITE LANGLIR and captured an enemy strong point. The 329th Regiment destroyed an infantry-tank strong point east of PETITE LANGLIR and advanced its lines along the BOIS DE RONCE nearly a half mile. The enemy was resisting stubbornly and appeared to have concentrated armor in this sector. Thus on the afternoon of 10 January we find the 331st Infantry and 329th Infantry on a line extending generally east and west approximately two kilometers north of PETITE LANGLIR. The 331st Infantry had the 2nd and 3rd Battalions on line with the 1st Battalion in reserve. The 330th Infantry having been attached to the 3rd Armored Division, therefore leaving the Division with two Regiments. The mission, of the 83rd Division, in effect was to attack generally south to cut the ST VITH-HOUFFALIZE highway.

(See Map B) (7)

(6) A-1, p. 130

(7) A-3, 10 Jan 45

DISPOSITIONS AND PLANS OF 331ST INFANTRY

On the afternoon of 10 January the 331st Infantry was continuing the attack, in conjunction with the 329th Infantry. Both Regiments were pushing slowly forward against an enemy that was fighting a desperate delaying action. The enemy was utilizing key terrain features, and organizing them with Infantry supported by tanks and self-propelled guns, further supported by artillery that was well zeroed in on points along the division front and all likely supply avenues in our rear.

The 331st Infantry had the 2nd Battalion on the right and in the village of BIHAIN. The front line extended generally east with the 3rd Battalion on the left and in contact with the 329th Infantry approximately 1500 yards northeast of PETITE LANGLIR.

(See Map B) (8)

The 1st Battalion, being in reserve, had closed in its new assembly area in the village LIERNEUX at approximately 1700 hours.

The Regimental Plan called for the 2nd and 3rd Battalions to continue the attack. The 1st Battalion was to pass through the 2nd Battalion near BIHAIN on the morning of 11 January as soon as they could get in position to do so.

1ST BATTALION SITUATION AND PLAN

The 1st Battalion 331st Infantry was commanded at the time by Lieutenant Colonel Henry S. Neilson; the Company Commanders were: Company A, Captain Wilfred E. Barber; Company B, Captain Daniel M. Moore; Company C, Captain Harlan Wright; Company D, Captain Harry C. Gravelyn. All these officers with the exception of Captain Wright had been with the Battalion since before its

(8) A-6, 10 Jan 45

arrival in England in April 1944. Captain Wright joined the Battalion as a replacement in August 1944. (9)

The Battalion was at approximately 90% strength with about 50% being comparatively new to combat, this included both officers and enlisted men. There was no problem with supplies, with the exception that there wasn't enough overshoes to go around. The Battalion was gradually overcoming this by collecting the overshoes from the dead and wounded as they were being evacuated through the aid station, in spite of this, all companies were still short several pairs. The physical condition of the men wasn't very good due to the fact that the Battalion had either been attacking or defending continuously since early December. The intense cold and deep snow drifts had sapped their strength at a rapid rate until at this time they were in semi-exhausted condition. The morale was good. The men had rather fight than lie in cold, wet foxholes, by doing this they were able to keep much warmer, also prevent frozen feet and hands. (10)

At about 2100 hours the Company Commander of A Company received a message, stating in part to report to the Regimental CP, which at this time was in HALT on the southern outskirts of HEBRONVAL, (11) on arriving at the CP the Company Commander was met by Lieutenant Colonel Neilson, 1st Battalion Commanding Officer, and informed that A Company was to make a night attack, as soon as possible. The plan called for A Company to pass through the 2nd Battalion in BIHAIN, attack generally southeast through the forest and secure the north bank of the LANGLIR RIVER.

- (9) Personal knowledge
- (10) Personal knowledge
- (11) A-7, 10 Jan 45

The Company Commander argued against this using these points (1) No time for reconnaissance; (2) The semi-exhausted condition of the men; (3) The distance the men would have to march before reaching the line of departure, (the distance being approximately 10,000 yards) (4) The time now being almost 2200 hours. (12)

The plan was finally cancelled and a new one called for a coordinated attack by the 1st Battalion as soon after daylight as completion of a reconnaissance would permit.

At daylight 11 January found the 1st Battalion on the march moving toward BIHAIN. The men had had a good night's rest and a hot breakfast. The morale, at this time, was excellent. In the meantime the Battalion Commanding Officer and staff, Company Commanders with radio operators and drivers were moving by jeep to BIHAIN to make the reconnaissance. Arriving just as the sun was rising, also just at the same time the enemy decided to counterattack the town. They struck with approximately two hundred infantry and five tanks. The attack caught the 2nd Battalion completely by surprise, most of the men were asleep. Before the attack could be halted the enemy succeeded in capturing the southern half of the town. To withdraw was impossible as all avenues of escape were cut, if not by men, then by fire. The fire fight raged for almost three hours before we succeeded in routing the enemy and driving the few survivors back into the forest.

(See Map C) (13)

The only casualties suffered by the Reconnaissance group was two men killed and one wounded from Company D. The 2nd

- (12) Personal knowledge
- (13) Personal knowledge

Battalion suffered quite heavily, but succeeded in knocking out three enemy tanks and killing an estimated one hundred infantry.

?? By now the 1st Battalion had reached a point about 500 ?? yards west of OTTRE, where they had been halted by the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Kenneth Scott. At this point is where the reconnaissance party rejoined the Battalion. It was here that the attack plan was formulated, and still no reconnaissance had been made. ???

The plan called for the Battalion to attack in column of companies with A Company leading followed by Companies C and B. The line of departure was to be the trail running generally east and west along the ridge line about 600 yards north of BIHAIN. The right boundary initially the main road leading into BIHAIN, left boundary, no limit. The direction of attack due south across the ST MARTIN RIVER into the edge of the forest, then southeast along the trail to the north bank of the LANGLIR RIVER. (14)

NARRATION

At 1120 hours 11 January A Company crossed the line of departure in column of platoons in wedge formation with extended interval. The 1st Platoon leading, followed by Heavy Machine Gun Platoon attached from Company D, Company Command Group, 2nd Platoon with Light Machine Gun Section from Company A attached, remainder of the Weapons Platoon, and the Third Platoon. (See Map C)

Major General Robert C. Macon, the Commanding General of the 83rd Division, was present at the line of departure as the Company crossed. By speaking words of encouragement and a pat on the back to some of the men, did more to bolster the morale

(14) Personal knowledge

of these battle weary men than any other one thing could have. The effect that this had on the men was, indeed, amazing. It was never forgotten by the men of Company A. (15)

21. The attack jumped off without supporting fires from either mortars or artillery, although there was forward observers from each with the Company Command group. Both the artillery and mortars were in position to furnish fire on call.

As the 1st Platoon advanced through the knee deep snow to within about 100 yards of the narrow ST MARTIN RIVER, enemy artillery began falling in and around the advancing troops. Due to the extended formation and the leadership of Lieutenant Dodd, the 1st Platoon Leader, the platoon continued to advance followed by the rest of the Company. The entire Company passed through this, not too accurate artillery, without any casualties. The 1st Platoon found the small ST MARTIN RIVER to be no more than a creek, and no obstacle whatsoever to foot troops, although vehicles could not be taken across at this point. As the 1st Platoon crossed the remainder of the Company held up on the northern banks until the 1st Platoon reached the edge of the forest, from where it sent several patrols well into the wooded area. This edge of the forest was found not to be occupied. On receiving the all clear signal from Lieutenant Dodd the remainder of the company was moved into the near edge of the wood deployed with the 1st Platoon on the right of the trail, the 2nd Platoon, under the leadership of Lieutenant Donald Helm, on the left. So far the Company had received no small arms fire whatsoever. This seemed strange as this was near the point where strong counter-attack had been launched against BIRAIN earlier in the morning. (See Map C)

(15) Personal knowledge

As the edge of the woods was the initial objective of the Company, the Company Commander made sure the flanks were secured and notified the Battalion Commander as to his position. The only means of communications at this time was by SCR 300 radio. Lieutenant Colonel Neilson ordered the Company to continue the attack astride the trail to the battalion objective, he also stated that Company C would jump off immediately and join Company A on the objective. The trail was to be the boundary between Companies with Company C on the right. He further stated that if resistance was met as we advanced through the forest to notify Battalion, as to the location, and bypass it if possible and Company B would eliminate it as they moved up. (See Map C)

This forest was like most on the European Continent being criss-crossed with fire breaks. These breaks were approximately thirty feet wide. In this area the terrain was made up mostly with low rolling hills with gentle slopes, which gave the enemy wonderful fields of fire, grazing fire in some places up to 400 yards. By setting machine guns up at the intersections of these fire breaks the enemy could control most of the forest with very few men and guns. This gave the enemy a marked advantage as we were not able to locate their positions until they had opened fire.

The trees on the near edge of the forest was tall with no low branches, the snow wasn't drifted within the woods but was just a little over knee deep to the average man. This made walking quite difficult. After the Company had advanced about 200 yards it suddenly found itself in a forest of young trees planted in rows of about six feet apart. The trees were

approximately fifteen feet tall with the bottom branches about four feet above the ground. All branches were heavily laden with snow, visibility at no point was more than thirty feet. As the men advanced they would have to bend forward in order to clear the low branches. As they would brush against the branches the snow and pine needles would fall down their necks adding greatly to their discomfort.

After advancing about 100 yards through this young forest the left squad of the 2nd Platoon came to the first fire break, as they were crossing an enemy machine gun opened fire from about 200 yards up the break. The Company Commander moved to the left flank to check on the situation. There he contacted Lieutenant Helm and found that one squad was safely across, and the remainder of the platoon on the near side. This fire break ran diagonally across our front, where it intersected the trail on which we were advancing is where the enemy machine gun was set up. An attempt was made to get more men across, this met with failure, as they neared the break the enemy would open fire with machine guns and rifles. The enemy force was known to be at least two machine guns and several rifles. It was decided to leave the one squad across the fire break as a holding force until Company B could move up and clear the obstacle. The remainder of the 2nd Platoon would move to the right of the trail and follow the 1st Platoon. The Battalion Commander was notified of this action and the Company moved on to the objective without further incident, arriving there at about 1600 hours. An all around defense was set up to the left of the trail awaiting the arrival of Company C, which came at about 1700 hours. The flanks of both companies

were tied in. The men dug in the best they could through frozen ground and snow. During this time intermittent artillery was falling in the area, also both companies were receiving machine gun fire from across the LANGLIR RIVER. (See Map C) (16)

The only contact with Battalion now was by the artillery radio that the forward observer had. We were notified that Battalion headquarters had moved into BIHAIN along with the aid station and ammunition dump, also that B Company was in BIHAIN and would remain there during the night. This left A and C Companies well over a 1000 yard forward of the front lines. With the enemy, of undetermined strength between them and friendly forces. With this in mind both companies prepared to spend the night in the edge of the forest.

The men started preparing positions for the night; after they had completed digging their foxholes it was noted that water was seeping in. This water continued rising until it had reached a depth of about one foot. The men were not able to keep their feet dry and warm, this added greatly to their discomfort as the temperature was around zero degrees and it had begun to snow again.

Just before dark firing broke out in the rear of C Company. This proved to be a rather strong enemy force armed with Schmeisser Pistols and Panzerfaust. They succeeded in over running C Company's mortar positions capturing the mortars and wounding several men. This fire fight was taking place about 100 yards from A Company's right flank. Realizing the situation in C Company was rather serious, after some of their men withdrew into A Company area, the Company Commander of A Company sent

(16) Personal knowledge

a strong patrol to envelope the enemy rear. This was very effective as the enemy was soon routed with the loss of fifteen killed, but none captured. Nor was any of C Company's equipment recovered. In this brief action C Company had one killed, five wounded; A Company one wounded. It is believed this was the enemy force that was bypassed earlier in the afternoon, as we had no further contact while in this position. The enemy artillery no longer was falling in the area and the machine gun fire to our front had ceased. (See Map C)

At 2130 hours Lieutenant Colonel Neilson came to the CP of A Company. He stated that the battalion had been ordered to make a night attack and was due to jump off at 2200 hours, thirty minutes from now. The battalion was supposed to be on the western edge of LANGLIR at 2200 hours prepared to move into the town as soon as the artillery preparation had lifted. Thirteen battalions of artillery was to fire a fifteen minute T.O.T. the last rounds from one battalion was to be smoke so we would know the preparation was over. (17)

This was to be a division coordinated attack with both regiments, 331st and 329th attacking abreast with the main effort being in the area of PETITE LANGLIR. 1st Battalion, 331st, was to attack generally ^{East See Map C} west, from its position on the bank of the LANGLIR RIVER, seize the town of LANGLIR, prevent the enemy from reinforcing from the south, also to cut his escape route from the north.

The Battalion plan was C Company to lead and seize the south half of the town. A Company to follow and seize the Main east-west road and the north half of the town.

(17) Personal knowledge

Knowing by now that the LANGLIR RIVER was only a small stream and the bridge as shown on the Map was not a conventional type, but in reality was a man-made ford. The ford had a rocky bottom and the water not over six inches in depth. This was no obstacle whatsoever to either foot troops or vehicles of any type.

lack of communications
Messenger planning
The A Company Commander realizing that it was impossible to accomplish the mission in the time allotted, called in his platoon leaders and issued his attack order. Locating the platoon leaders in the extreme darkness of the forest was in itself a big job. The trees were so thick and the air so full of snow that a person could only see a matter of a few inches. It was not unusual to run into a tree before seeing it. These men being mostly combat veterans, would more than likely shoot first and ask questions later. In locating the Platoon Leaders and getting them to the CP took over thirty minutes.

Since the Company Commander had no map of the area the attack order consisted of just telling the Platoon Leaders his plan, which was to lead with the 1st Platoon followed by the Third Platoon, both of these platoons would have one section of heavy machine guns attached, followed by the weapons less the light machine gun section which was attached to the Second Platoon bringing up the rear.

The 1st Platoon was to seize and clear all the buildings on the left side of the street, the 3rd Platoon with the same mission on the right side. The 2nd Platoon and the remainder of the weapons platoon were to occupy these buildings and prevent the enemy from re-entering.

To issue the order and get the company assembled took approximately two and one half hours, making the time now after 2400 hours.

Passing for
Information

It was now noted that C Company was not ready to move, a messenger was dispatched to C Company CP. On his return he stated that Captain Wright would not be ready for at least another hour. With this in mind, the Company Commander of A Company decided to move out and let C Company follow. This information was sent to C Company and the Platoon Leaders notified of the change in plans. The Company was to move on order of the Company Commander after he had made a personal check of all Platoons. On returning to the head of the column the Company Commander found that the 1st Platoon had moved out. An attempt was made to contact it by SCR 536 radio, but no luck. Hoping the platoon would be fortunate enough in finding the objective the remainder of the Company moved out with the idea of following the trail left by the 1st Platoon. On clearing the woods and crossing the river we moved into open ground. Here the wind, which was very strong by now, was blowing the snow terrifically, obliterating the trail of the 1st Platoon. It was also impossible to locate the trail which would lead the Company into LANGLIR. The time now approximately 0130 hours 11 January. (See Map C) (18)

The only way possible to move was by single file changing the lead man every few minutes. The terrain across which the Company moved was from almost bare ground to snow drifts up to five feet deep. The riflemen carried four bandoleers of ammunition extra, along with two hand grenades and one clip of BAR ammunition. This was SOP within the Company. Some of the men were fortunate enough to get snow capes, but these proved to be ineffective as they would become frozen and break, they were discarded during this move.

(18) Personal knowledge

Executive Fellowship

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The Company Commander went forward to the 1st Platoon. It was here that it was decided that the Company was probably in the right town but in the wrong section. It was further noted that enemy was withdrawing and had not detected the presence of the 1st Platoon. It was then decided to push the platoon up to the cross-roads in hopes of being able to establish a road block, however, this was not accomplished as the next houses were occupied by the enemy most of whom were asleep. Some of these managed to escape, evidently notifying the tankers. It was not long before enemy tanks were firing direct fire from very close range, into the buildings occupied by the 1st Platoon. It was then learned that the Company had only one bazooka, it had been destroyed by the first round that came through the building. The enemy made no effort to move ground troops against the 1st Platoon's positions, but continued his direct firing into any building that might be occupied by our troops. It was evident now that the enemy was withdrawing, as there were vehicles and men continuously on the main road moving to the south. (20)

Altogether the Company had six buildings in its possession. It was decided to move the 3rd Platoon into the town to help the 1st Platoon hold its initial gain. The 2nd Platoon and remainder of the Weapons Platoon were to dig in, in the area around the cemetery and protect the flanks and rear. The Company at this time did not have contact with either Company C or battalion headquarters knowing that the battalion had some tanks attached to it, the Company Commander decided to take three men and return to the battalion area for these tanks. It was thought that Company C

(20) Personal knowledge

would be contacted on the return trip, however, no contact was made and C Company wasn't in the woods where they were last seen. Moving on through the forest the patrol met Lieutenant Colonel Neilson who was coming forward with a platoon of tanks. After orienting him on the situation he returned to BIHAIN to notify Regiment, also to try to locate Company C by radio. The Company Commander and patrol returned with the tanks to a defiladed area in rear of the 2nd Platoon and detailed a squad from the Platoon as close in protection for the tanks. The Tank Platoon Leader was told by the Company Commander to stay in this position until he was notified to move. The Company Commander returned to the 1st Platoon area only to find that in his absence that Company C had finally arrived on the scene. The Company Commander had moved the entire Company into the buildings occupied by Company A. (See Map C)

By now it was around 0600 hours and the majority of the enemy force had withdrawn to the woods south of town. Their tanks were still firing at the buildings held by our troops. Since the enemy tanks had withdrawn A Company pushed across the main road and set up a road block that succeeded in stopping the enemy foot elements. By daylight Company A had succeeded in clearing all of C Company sector, realizing that the southern edge of the town was the more important. The C Company Commander refused to assist, in any way, the attack on the town, the Company never moved from the buildings they initially occupied.

The 2nd Platoon with the mortar section of A Company was still in the cemetery area. Around 0800 hours firing broke out

in the tank platoon assembly area this firing appeared to be from friendly weapons. On investigating this firing it was found that the tank platoon was moving from its assembly area toward town. As they moved forward they were firing their weapons to the front. The Tank Cannons were firing into the buildings occupied by friendly troops. The machine guns were raking the entire area. As the tanks approached the 2nd Platoon area their machine gun fire killed one man and wounded four. As there was no communication with the tanks there was no way in which to stop them. They moved into town in single file, with one tank at the cross road they stopped, at this moment they were taken under fire by enemy tanks in the edge of the forest about 600 yards south of the town. Four of these tanks were knocked out immediately, the other managed to get under cover behind one of the buildings. (21)

As the tanks were moving into town they must have been observed by the enemy. Just at this time enemy artillery began to fall into the town along with direct fire from tanks and self-propelled guns. This barrage was one of the most terrific that A Company had ever encountered. This fire also was very accurate. This put both companies in a cross fire, the enemy from the south and friendly tanks from the northwest. Movement of any kind in the town was now impossible. The enemy fire continued until after the four tanks had been knocked out. After that, terrific barrages, came at irregular intervals throughout the day. This artillery greatly hampered the movements of Company A and it wasn't until 1120 hours that all buildings had been cleared

(21) Personal knowledge

and contact made with the 329th Infantry. This contact was made with a patrol from the 2nd Battalion, 329th Infantry. At 1300 hours 12 January 1945 the town of LANGLIR BELGIUM was officially reported to Division Headquarters as being cleared of all enemy troops. At 1400 hours the 2nd Battalion, 329th Infantry, relieved the 1st Battalion of responsibility of the defense of LANGLIR. The Battalion remained in the town awaiting its next mission. (22)

Evacuation of the wounded had been impossible since there was no means available to do so. The aid station being in BIHAIM was over 2000 yards away. No litter bearers were made available to the assault companies and the only medical personnel present were the aid men with the Company. These aid men did a wonderful job with their limited amount of supplies, they had to carry morphine syrettes under their arm pits to keep them from freezing. Company A had thirty-four wounded men in LANGLIR that could not be evacuated due to the intense artillery fire from the enemy. These men weren't evacuated until late in the afternoon and then by an armored ambulance borrowed from an armored unit in the area. Casualties for A Company for this operation was thirty-five wounded, one killed. Several men were evacuated within the next 24 hours due to exhaustion, frozen feet and hands. (23)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISMS

1. RECONNAISSANCE

A thorough reconnaissance and a sound plan are essential elements of an attack. In the attack of the morning of 11 January,

(22) A-2, 13 Jan 45

(23) Personal knowledge

also the night attack of 11 January, adequate reconnaissance was not made. It is felt that in both cases had there been time for a thorough reconnaissance that a much better plan could have been worked out. In the night attack the only reconnaissance by A Company Commander was just a glimpse at the Battalion Commander's map. This led to a doubt in the Platoon Leaders' minds as to just what was expected of the Platoons.

2. ORDERS

Attack orders should be issued by higher headquarters in ample time to allow subordinate leaders sufficient time to make a sound plan. In both attacks of 11 January this was not done by the Battalion Commander due to no fault of his own. On receiving the order for the night attack the Company Commander had only thirty minutes in which to issue his order, assemble the Company, and be at the edge of LANGLIR approximately 1000 yards distant. This was an impossibility.

3. COMMUNICATIONS

Throughout this operation communications failed at a time when they were most needed. The battalion depended solely on radio which proved ineffective due to extreme weather conditions and extended distances especially for the smaller radios. It is believed that had Battalion followed the assault companies with a wire team that communication would have been adequate especially since enemy artillery was comparatively light until after the battalion was on its main objective.

4. TERRAIN, WEATHER AND ENEMY

Certainly, no record of the ARDENNES Campaign is complete without reference to the terrain, weather and the enemy. In the snow laden hills of the ARDENNES forest, fighting the weather was

harder than fighting the enemy. The bitter cold and heavy snow took as large a toll in Allied Casualties as did German bullets and shells. The oil on the rifles would freeze rendering the weapon useless until it could be thawed out. The men's faces became chapped, their feet and hands would freeze but they continued to fight day and night against a stubborn, sometimes fanatical enemy. An attempt was made to camouflage the riflemen with snow capes, but this didn't prove very effective due to the fact that the material, from which they were made, when they became wet and frozen, would crackle and pop as the men walked, also would rustle against the trees when moving through the forest, at night this sound could be heard for some distance. Often times ammunition, rations and other supplies had to be hand carried great distances due to drifted snow which prevented movement of vehicles. Throughout this campaign the temperature averaged near zero degrees, with occasional snow storms. To survive called for great stamina and grit and a generous amount of good luck. To those that did survive, the memory of the ARDENNES Campaign will be everlasting.

5. SUPPLY AND EVACUATION

Supplies in this operation proved to be no particular problem except on occasions, when the drifting snow would block the roads, but the engineers cleared these in short order. Evacuation was a different story. Here we find two companies approximately 2,000 yards forward of the aid station with no medical support other than the Company Aid Men. The supplies these men could carry were not sufficient to meet the demand. At one time there was approximately seventy-five casualties on hand with no way to evacuate them.

This situation could have been remedied to a great extent had litter bearers been attached or if the infantry battalion had armored ambulances attached. It was this type ambulance that finally did the evacuating, although the casualties had to wait several hours before this could be accomplished.

6. LEADERSHIP AND MORALE

It is well to note that the morale of A Company was considered as fair. The main reason for this was the men's fear of being wounded and having to lie in the extreme cold and snow, for no telling how long before they could be evacuated. This was the greatest worry the men had. The majority of these men had been fighting since early December through the HURTGEN forest on to the RUHR RIVER thence to the ARDENNES. These men were, indeed, battle weary and had the feeling that one can't live forever. These were grave problems as far as the Company Commander was concerned, exactly how to cope with them, he was at a loss. One big thing that did help, was the appearance of their Commanding General on the morning of 11 January.

Leadership throughout this operation by the Platoon Leaders and Non-Commissioned Officers is felt to be superior. Through all phases of the two attacks these leaders were constantly on the alert, checking the men, making sure their units were intact, out front leading, in rear driving when necessary. Without this leadership it is doubtful if the company would have reached their objective. This is the type of leadership that wins battles.

7. OBJECTIVE

The town of LANGLIR proved to be too strongly held for one Company to capture immediately, although two companies were in the

attack there was only one that did any fighting. Company A was in the wrong section, but was very fortunate to even locate the objective. Had Company C participated in the attack it is felt the town could have been cleared prior to daylight and the escape route for the enemy would have been cut much earlier.

Although the battalion was successful in the mission, had the companies been able to reach the town at 2200 hours with supporting tanks or tank destroyers, the town could have been taken and road blocks set up with sufficient strength to have been effective against the enemy armor within the town, as it was the infantry did not have the weapons with which to combat tanks. As a result all enemy armor in the near vicinity along with an unknown number of foot troops were able to withdraw. There is no doubt these were the same tanks that knocked out the four friendly tanks the following day, also the ones that were firing direct fire into the buildings occupied by members of both A and C Companies.

8. ATTACHED ARMOR

Had the Platoon Leader of the attached Tank Platoon carried out instructions that were given to him the four tanks would not have been lost nor would A Company have lost the one man killed and four wounded. The only excuse the Platoon Leader could give for his action was that he thought that it was time for him to come into town and help consolidate defensive positions.

LESSONS

1. Without a thorough reconnaissance prior to a night attack that it is impossible to work out a sound attack plan.

2. Commanders must issue orders in ample time for subordinate leaders to have time to work out a workable plan.

3. The SCR 536 and 300 are good radios but under extreme weather conditions their range is greatly shortened.

4. In snow and cold ordinary winter clothing that was issued to troops at this time, was not adequate to keep the men warm and dry.

5. In cold and snow wounded should be evacuated immediately, since exposure in this weather adds greatly to shock that follows a serious wound.

That armored ambulances definitely have a place in the Infantry.

6. In a night attack under extreme weather conditions leadership must be at its best.

Visits from higher Commanders are definitely a booster to morale.

7. In assigning units objectives enough supporting weapons should be used in order that those units may accomplish their mission.

8. That all unit leaders must cooperate and coordinate in order to make a successful fighting team.